

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-08 COME-00 DOTE-00 AID-05 XMB-02

TRSE-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 /031 W

-----231417Z 055828 /46

R 231011Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6548

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR BEXP EAID US MP

SUBJECT: GOM REQUEST FOR USG TO SUPPLY BUSES

1. AT MY MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER , SIR HAROLD WALTER, ON MARCH 17, HE MADE AN INFORMAL BUT OFFICIAL REQUEST THAT THE USG SUPPLY 60 TO 100 PASSENGER BUSES TO GOM TO HELD ALLEVIATE CRISIS IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT INDUSTRY. HE SAID HE HAD READ IN PRESS THAT USG RECENTLY GAVE EGYPT 600 BUSES, AND IT OCCURRED TO HIM THAT USG MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP MAURITIUS ALONG SAME LINES. HIS PROPOSAL WOULD BE THAT GOM LEASE OR SELL (ON CREDIT) THE BUSES TO THE BEST-MANAGED BUS COMPANIES OF THE ISLAND TO ASSIST THEM TO EXTEND AND IMPORVE THEIR SERVICES.

2. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE FROM OTHER REPORTING FROM POST, PUBLIC TRANSPORT INDUSTRY HAS BEEN IN A STATE OF CRISIS SINCE DECEMBER, WITH VERY POOR INTER-CITY BUS SERVICE WHICH HAS CAUSED A GREAT DEAL OF GRUMBLING FROM COMMUTERS. THIS SITUATION IS COSTING THE GOVERNMENT POPULAR SUPPORT AS WELL. PROBLEM IS CAUSED BY A MULTITUDE OF FACTORS, INCLUDING EXCESSIVE ABSENTEEISM BY DRIVERS AND CONDUCTORS WHO PREFER TO WORK ONLY WHEN PREMIUM PAY APPLIES, OLD AND WORN-OUT EQUIPMENT THAT IS DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN, RECENT MADATORY WAGE INCREASES, HIGHER FUEL COSTS, LOW REVENUES DESPITE A GENERAL FARE INCREASE GRANTED BY GOVERNMENT IN JANUARY, AND POPULAR RESISTANCE TO

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ANY FURTHER INCREASE IN BUS FARES. ONLY THREE OF SOME 20 BUS COMPANIES ARE EARNING ANY PROFIT. OPPOSITION MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT HAS BEEN ADVOCATING NATIONALIZATION OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT AS THE SOLUTION, BUT GOVERNMENT IS RESISTANT AS IT FEARS EVEN GREATER INEFFICIENCIES WOULD RESULT. WITH THIS THREAT HANGING OVER THEM, BUS COMPANIES ARE NATURALLY RELUCTANT TO INVEST IN NEW EQUIPMENT. WALTER'S IDEA IS THAT

GOM WOULD ACQUIRE THE NEW EQUIPMENT AND COMPANIES WOULD PAY FOR IT OVER TIME.

3. REQUEST DEPARTMENT'S ADVICE AS TO WHETHER THERE IS ANY WAY WE COULD BE HELPFUL IN THIS AREA. WOULD THERE BE A POSSIBILITY OF EX-IM BANK FINANCING, FOR EXAMPLE? COULD US MANUFACTURERS OFFER COMPETITIVE PRICES FOR BUSES? DO THEY MANUFACTURE RIGHT-HAND DRIVE VEHICLES? (NOTE: IN PAST, COMPANIES HAVE MOSTLY IMPORTED BUS CHASSIS AND ADDED BODY MANUFACTURED LOCALLY.)
KEELEY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, MOTOR BUSES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 23-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PORTL00268
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770099-0704
Format: TEL
From: PORT LOUIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770331/aaaabaic.tel
Line Count: 73
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 5697aab3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3023592
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOM REQUEST FOR USG TO SUPPLY BUSES
TAGS: PFOR, BEXP, EAID, US, MP
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/5697aab3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009